

Promoting Emotional Intelligence in Children

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Promoting Emotional Intelligence in Children: How to become your child's emotional coach

1. Why do we feel emotions?
2. What is emotional intelligence?
3. Why does emotional intelligence matter?
4. What gets in the way of emotional intelligence?
5. How can we serve as an emotional coach to nurture emotional intelligence in our children?

i) Parental modeling

- Parental self-awareness
- Parental self-understanding
- Parental self-regulation

ii) Identify Feelings

- Baby sign language
- Identify feelings in other people
- Identify feelings in books & characters
- Identify feelings in your child

iii) Encourage mindfulness

- Compassionate awareness
- Body awareness
- Self-awareness
- Nature awareness

iv) Promote emotional regulation in your child

- Proactive emotional regulation interventions
- Interventions when your child is *getting* overwhelmed
 - Mainstream interventions
 - Collaborative problem solving
 - Playful interventions
- Interventions when your child *is* overwhelmed
 - Listen to big feelings
 - Emotional regulation happens in relationship
 - Make sure to establish your own support network

i) Parental Modeling

Parental Self-Awareness & Emotional Identification

- Asking yourself “What do I feel? What do I need?”
- Healthy, regulated and appropriate identification of your own feelings

Parental Self-Understanding

- Understanding your past and how your past impacts your emotional expression

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- Understanding how your relationship with your feelings impacts your children
- Parental Self-Regulation
- Bring calm to the chaos instead of adding stress to the distress
 - **STOP: Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed** - *Bob Stahl*

ii) Identify Feelings

Baby Sign Language

- Babies are born with emotional awareness
- Limbic system is in tact at birth
- Introduce a rich vocabulary of feelings to your child early on

Identify Feelings in Others

- “Anything mentionable is manageable.” – Fred Rogers
- Big, unidentified feelings can be confusing and overwhelming
- Relieves anxiety and helps kids make sense of experiences
- Develops empathy, a central facet of EI

Identify Feelings in Characters in Books

- Developing emotional literacy
- Ask “How is s/he feeling?” “Why is s/he feeling _____?” “How do you know?”
- Make a silly guess to help your child make guesses

Identify Feelings in Your Child

- “Emotion can’t be processed until language can be put to it.” – Ann Bach
- Name feelings from an empathic, emotionally connected place
- Look for the need and feelings behind the problematic behavior
- Practice the “Replay”

iii) Encourage mindfulness

Mindfulness of Body

- Builds tissue in the insula – brain center involved with empathy
- Can improve our empathic abilities
- Roughhousing: ↑ body awareness, aggression management & impulse control
- Listen to heartbeat in midst of active play
- Hand on belly when breathing in midst of active play

Mindfulness of Self & Emotions

- Practice narratives about the day. Each takes a turn. No pressure.
- Thumb game: Thumbs up, thumbs down, thumbs to the side
- Emotional thermostat - Green zone, orange zone, red zone
- Weather report

Mindfulness of Nature

iv) Promote Your Child’s Emotional Regulation

Emotional Regulation = Appropriate Containment and Expression of Emotion

- Goal is not to *stop* the expression of unpleasant feelings or big feelings
- Like elimination training – know when to hold it in and when to let it go

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- Goal is to “**achieve a wide range and high intensity of emotional experience while maintaining flexible, adaptive & organized behavior**”. – Dan Siegel
- Incredibly useful to be able to modulate the emotional experience

Proactive Emotional Regulation Interventions

- Parental modeling of emotional regulation. Practice. Builds empathy for kids.
- Roughhousing – practice with revving up and calming down / impulse control
- Emotional thermostat – green, orange, red zones
- Lori Lite’s books and meditation CD’s for kids

Emotional Regulation When Your Child is *Getting* Overwhelmed – in the “Orange Zone”

- Regulate your own emotional state. Put on your oxygen mask first. Breathe.
- Come close, stay calm, & say with warmth in your voice, “I’m here to help you.”
- Assess which zone your child is in
- If in the “red zone”, then Staylisten (see Listen To Your Child’s Big Feelings)
- If in the “orange zone”, have a “*We’re in this together!*” attitude:
 - o “Your body is moving a lot. Let’s slow down your arms & legs.”
 - o “Let’s try to calm your body down.”
 - o “Let’s take 3 deep breaths together.” (long and slow)
 - o “What will help you calm down?”
 - o Emotional thermostat: “Hmmm. I think you’re in the orange zone. I wonder what we can do to help calm your body down.”
 - o Look for the feeling/need behind the behavior. State calmly, “You’re upset because Tommy bumped into you and you need some space.”
 - o Offer an alternative action, “Instead of throwing a toy, you can tell him, ‘I need my space, Tommy.’”
 - o Do a “replay” of the situation. “You were sitting quietly, playing with the Legos, then Tommy came over. He stood too close to you and bumped you. You got upset and threw a toy.” You could also add, “Hmmm. I wonder what you could say instead next time?”
 - o Collaborative Problem Solving (see below)
 - o Intervene playfully (see below)

Collaborative Problem Solving

Conflict Resolution Skills and Frustration Management (**Explosive Child** by Ross Greene)

- The second goal = Help your child think clearly in midst of frustration.
- The first goal = Help your child stay calm enough to attain the second goal.
- Baskets A,B&C: A=Adult wins, C=Child wins, B=Both win
- “So you want X, and I want Y. What can we do so we’re both a little happy?”

Playful Interventions - Playlistening (Patty Wipfler, [Hand in Hand Parenting](#))

Laughter releases the knot of tension, clears the emotional fog, and boosts connection

- Rigorous snuggle
- Shaking the “crankies” out
- “I think it’s time for...a pancake!” or “I think it’s time for...a burrito!”

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- Externalize the problem (very effective with anxiety / fears)
 - o You pretend to have the issue in an overly dramatic, playful way
 - o A puppet or a doll or stuffed animal has the problem
 - o A character in the book has the problem

Emotional Regulation When Your Child Is Overwhelmed – in the “red zone”

Practice **Staylistening** (Patty Wipfler, [Hand in Hand Parenting](http://www.HandInHandParenting.org))

- **CCC** – stay **Calm**, come **Close** & offer **Connection**
- When your child is drowning in a sea of emotions
- When you have the capacity to stay regulated

Listening to big feelings is important

- Children need help with their big, emotional projects
- Be an emotional anchor when your child is drowning in a sea of overwhelm
- Your safe, warm presence will encourage *more* feelings to come out
- Promotes emotional regulation, which happens in relationship
- Your higher thinking prefrontal cortex “hugs” their emotional limbic system
- Re-boots their system, so they can feel good and think clearly again
- Your children will internalize your ability to remain regulated and calm

Listening to big feelings is challenging

- Our own big feelings weren’t listened to when we were kids
- Our own feelings were dismissed, invalidated, ignored, shamed and/or punished
- Our children’s feelings trigger us – implicit memories
- We feel powerless because we can’t stop *their* big feelings, inducing rage in *us*

Listening to big feelings requires emotional understanding & regulation in parent

- Important to get our own support system in place to be able to listen well
- Louis Lane to Superman, “You’ve got me, but whose got you?” Unless we are superheroes, we need others who “got us”.

“Anything that promotes emotional connection has a healing effect on the brain and nervous system.” – Dr. Thomas Lewis, **A General Theory of Love**

- John Gottman’s **ATTUNE**
 - A** Awareness of the emotion
 - T** Turning towards the emotions
 - T** Tolerance of the emotional experience
 - U** Understanding the emotion
 - N** Nondefensive listening to the emotion
 - E** Empathy towards the emotion
- Dan Siegel’s **COAL**: **C** Curious, **O** Open, **A** Accepting, **L** loving

“Don’t give up. Don’t give in. Give yourself.” – Patty Wipfler, [Hand in Hand Parenting](http://www.HandInHandParenting.org)
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